

Washington, D.C. - Today, Reps. Mike Castle (R-DE), Charlie Dent (R-PA), Maurice Hinchey (D-NY), and Rush Holt (D-NJ), co-chairs of the Delaware River Basin Task Force in the U.S. House of Representatives, introduced the Delaware River Basin Conservation Act of 2010 to further coordinate conservation efforts in the Delaware watershed. The Delaware River Basin includes part of the states of Delaware, New Jersey, New York, and Pennsylvania.

Unlike other geographic watershed programs, the Delaware River Basin lacks a Basin-wide coordinated conservation strategy and dedicated federal support. The Delaware River Basin Conservation Act of 2010 builds on current efforts in the Basin, and provides a non-regulatory framework for coordinating conservation and increasing resources for on-the-ground projects; and prioritizes living resources, restoring and protecting fish and wildlife habitat, and water quality.

"Under this legislation, we will be creating a needed federal umbrella charged with carrying out a coordinated strategy for protection and restoration efforts in the Delaware watershed, one of the nation's most important water bodies and natural landscapes," said Rep. Mike Castle. "I am pleased to be working with fellow co-chairs of the Delaware River Basin Task Force, and remain committed to working with stakeholders on the conservation of this national treasure of great cultural, environmental, and ecological importance."

"For decades, the Delaware River Basin has been overlooked while other significant watersheds recovered from degradation and flourished under a comprehensive federal strategy. This important legislation will enhance flood control, restore vital ecosystems and improve water quality throughout eastern Pennsylvania, and I am confident river communities in my District will benefit from the economic development opportunities associated with healthy water resources," said Rep. Charlie Dent.

"This legislation would create a long-needed basin-wide conservation strategy that will help ensure the necessary resources are directed to this precious watershed," Rep. Maurice Hinchey said. "I look forward to working with my colleagues in the House to move this important piece of environmental legislation forward."

"The Delaware River is the longest free-flowing river in the eastern United States, spanning from its headwaters in the Catskills of New York to the mouth of the Delaware Bay. Yet, the federal government never has had a comprehensive strategy addressing conservation, water quality, and fish and wildlife habitat protection," said Rep. Rush Holt. "The 6 million people who make their home along the River deserve a coordinated effort, as this legislation would establish."

Supporting Organizations to Date: Delaware River Basin Commission Ducks Unlimited Partnership for the Delaware Estuary

The Nature Conservancy (Delaware, New Jersey, New York, and Pennsylvania chapters)

Summary - Delaware River Basin Conservation Act of 2010

The Act requires the Secretary of the Interior to establish the Delaware River Basin Restoration Program (Program) within the U.S. Fish and Wildlife Service (Service). In establishing the Program, the Director of the Service is required to institute a new partnership --- specifically, to work in consultation with existing management structures to identify, prioritize, and implement restoration and protection activities in the entire Basin and adopt a single, basin-wide plan for implementation of the Program (Section 4).

The primary purpose of the Program is to develop and implement a coordinated approach to sustain and enhance habitat, water quality and flood control improvements for fish, wildlife and people. Recreation, public access, land-use planning, public outreach, and citizen involvement will also play a role in the Program. Investing in an appropriate level of planning, monitoring and evaluation will be necessary to maximize success of the Program.

An important component for realizing conservation success for wildlife and people in the Basin is a well-funded competitive grant program. The Director, in conjunction with key partners, would establish the grant program and provide for additional technical assistance to support on-the-ground projects. Consultation with the EPA, NOAA, ACOE and other public agencies, States and organizations with authorities for planning and implementation of conservation strategies in the Basin is specifically required by the Act (Section 5).

The Grant Program will support locally-driven, on-the-ground projects by non-profits, universities, state and local governments, community organizations and others. The federal share of each project is up to 75 percent.

As proposed, \$5 million/annually would be authorized for the program. A minimum of 75 percent must be used for the grant program and other technical assistance projects (Section 6).

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